



Special Edition

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SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

Making a big splash

by Clair Boatwright, Media Relations

Betty Norman, a Home Health speech pathologist in the Trident Public Health District, finds helping people recover their ability to speak after a stroke, throat or larynx cancer, or a brain injury very fulfilling.

"I find it very rewarding to work one-on-one with people," says Norman.

The Charleston native literally made quite a splash in August. Norman's child had invited a friend over to visit, so the three of them took a quiet summer stroll to the boat landing in nearby Riverland Terrace Park.

"It was hot, so we wanted to dip our toes in the water," said Norman.

A group of young boys stood on the dock. One jumped in. The others teased that the water was not deep and he was not really swimming. Another boy accused the first of being able to touch the bottom and jumped in, immediately yelling, "I'm drowning!"

"I thought he was joking until he clung to the first boy and dragged him under," Norman said, then described how she ran to the dock and looked for the lifesaver ring, but found none. She instructed the children to run to the nearby fire station for help. As the first boy broke free and swam to shore, Norman tried to grasp the drowning boy from the dock, but the



Betty Norman's DHEC training makes a difference in everyday life.

current swept him farther away and he sank from sight.

Without a second thought, she jumped in, knowing she had to find him quickly.

"As I was coming to the surface, he jumped on my back and took me under," Norman recalls. "My plans to rescue him according to certified lifesaving techniques had to change because he struggled so hard it

made it impossible to swim when we were above water."

Norman knew she had to act immediately or risk being drowned herself, so she struggled to the surface, took a deep breath, dove down and swam underwater to the dock. The other boys helped them out of the water just as firemen arrived.

One fireman, looking shaken, said that God must have sent an angel because the strong river current would surely have taken the child away if Norman had not been there. Norman's child hugged her, crying, "Mom, I thought you had drowned!"

Norman counseled her child not to be afraid of the water, but to learn safety rules. At the next scout meeting a project was born to raise enough money to buy a much-needed lifesaver ring for the dock.

"Until that day, I had never noticed there wasn't one," Norman says. "We'll try to make the Lifesaver Project regional, or even national."

"I'm so proud of my daughter and her friend. They obeyed my instructions and motivated the bigger kids to run for help," Norman added. "I believe this Girl See Lifesaver..."

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Scout project will help children learn that they can be lifesavers, too."

Norman was honored in late August with a Golden Apple Award by WCSC-TV. The boy's mother learned from that broadcast who had saved her son from drowning and contacted Norman to tell her she'd be forever grateful and that her son was now taking swimming lessons. Ironically, the mother confided to Norman that, while the rescue was going on, she had been comforting a friend whose child was dying. She expressed her gratitude that, but for the grace of God and Norman's quick action, it could have been she at a hospital or graveside.

But Norman insists she is not a hero.

"I was 'it.' There was no one else who could... so I did," she said.

However, there must be something very special about Betty Norman because her supervisor, Cansas Deitz, revealed this week that, since her impromptu "swim," Norman has saved another life.

"So many lives could be saved if everyone took a basic lifesaving course," Norman wisely observed.

Norman was at the Citadel Mall's play court recently and noticed a woman frantically sweeping her fingers in a toddler's mouth. Norman, a certified Red Cross CPR instructor, determined the child was unconscious and administered back blows. A piece of soft pretzel dislodged, and the child began breathing again – keeping yet another mother from having to grieve over the loss of a child.

"Betty is always helpful and caring about everyone from patients to co-workers. She

was so courageous to risk her own life to save a drowning child. She jumped in and saved his life without hesitation," Deitz says. "Betty lives her life in this manner. She is always willing to go far beyond what others would even consider. Her willingness to go the extra mile is an everyday occurrence.

"She is a wonderful co-worker and friend, really more like our sister – a part of our DHEC family. We are all so proud of her. I get choked up and cannot even express how I feel about Betty when I think about what she has done," said Deitz.

Betty Norman does not feel she is special. She says that DHEC requires all health care providers take CPR and hopes that everyone in the DHEC family will remain aware of what is going on around us because we can all save a life.



Comments from the Commissioner

As we focus on our work during these challenging fiscal times, the day-to-day and long-range effects of what we do are important. Every permit we approve or deny, each consent order we consider, every patient we meet and every budget cut we must plan for can seem paramount.

However, what is ultimately important are the things we do to protect the health of the state's population and its environment – especially when people like Betty Norman are in the right place at the right time, with the right training and the room in their hearts to think of others first and make a difference by saving lives. People like Betty Norman make DHEC extraordinary because at the heart of DHEC are people with heart.

We will weather fiscal storms the same way we prepare for hurricanes – so that we will survive to promote, protect and, yes, even prosper as a state again. Because of the efforts of our DHEC family we will remain focused on what is at the heart of our mission – life itself.

P. Earl Hunter

Editor's Notes

Heroes come in many configurations, and one outstanding South Carolina hero has applied her DHEC training in situations that might be daunting to most. Betty Norman can inspire us all to rise above and help others beyond our normal bounds.

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